

VZCZCXRO5888
PP RUEHIK RUEHPD RUEHYG
DE RUEHTI #0556/01 2070609
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 250609Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY TIRANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7284
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TIRANA 000556

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958:N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [SENV](#) [AL](#)
SUBJECT: ALBANIA'S HAZARDOUS WASTE STRATEGY

REF: TIRANA 406

SUMMARY

1. Albania is effectively reaching out for donor support to deal with the country's hazardous waste (HW) problem. The Ministry of Environment (MOE) has identified nine "hot zones" contaminated with several kinds of dangerous chemicals left over from the communist era. MOE has been working with the European Commission and also individual countries to remediate these zones. Due to the high toxicity of several types of HW, such as lead, mercury, and arsenic, Albania is seeking donor support to package the waste and ship it to countries with adequate facilities to dispose of it, rather than attempting to build an HW facility itself. To deal with the continuing production of less hazardous industrial wastes, the EC has dedicated several million euros to process and store these wastes in Albania.

USG Interest

2. The Embassy and Washington agencies have been concerned about how Albania will handle over twenty containers of HW left over from the Qafe Molle chemical weapons elimination program (reftel). In the Implementing Agreement between the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) and the Albanian Ministry of Defense, the MOD agreed to take possession of the HW which was a by-product of chemical agent destruction. The MOD expected the HW, consisting of salts of lead, mercury, and arsenic, to be stored in a permanent HW facility which would be located in Albania and financed by the EC. However, the EC changed its plans due to local resistance to a HW facility in their community, leaving the Qafe Molle waste problem unaddressed.

3. Although DTRA claimed the containers could safely contain the HW for 20 years, the containers began leaking several months after completion of the project in July 2007. In May 2008, DTRA's remediation contractor repackaged the HW, cleaned the scrap metal and sent it to the smelter, leaving 15 twenty-foot containers of HW for the GOA to dispose of.

More Practical To Ship the HW Abroad

4. In May 2008, PolOff discussed Albania's HW plans with Aleksandar Garuli, Deputy Minister of Environment, Forests, and Water Administration. According to Garuli, Albania has nine HW sites left over from the Hoxha era, containing various life-threatening chemicals. Garuli pointed out that different kinds of HW require separate methods of treatment and containment. Since these nine sites are relatively small and are not being added to, the GOA official believes it makes little sense to spend significant resources on a general purpose HW facility that could treat all types of HW. Instead, Garuli said Albania has been working with individual countries that have HW facilities in place. For instance:

-- Industrial chemicals in the vicinity of Porto Romano were leaching into the local marshland from decaying containers. The

Dutch government packaged the HW, which was then shipped to Germany for permanent storage.

-- The EC funded the packaging of arsenic salts in the vicinity of Fier. Albania is looking for a donor to accept the HW, possibly Italy.

-- Cyanide compounds discovered in Qafe Molle were packaged and shipped to the United Kingdom for destruction and permanent storage, funded by DTRA.

-- Thirty tons of fuming nitric acid, a component of SA-2 rocket fuel, is being packaged by the OSCE and will be shipped to Sweden for destruction.

-- Small quantities of nuclear compounds have been shipped to Germany for storage.

15. When the EC HW project was terminated due to local protests, the EC redirected approximately seven million euros to deal with industrial wastes. Treatment and storage facilities were built near the city of Lac to treat the wastes of a phosphate factory and another facility was built near Rubik for a copper smelter. According to Garuli, new factories as well as newly-privatized existing factories will have to conform to stiff EU environmental standards, and will be responsible for disposing of whatever contaminants they produce.

Comment

16. While importing and storing HW is a profitable business for many

TIRANA 00000556 002 OF 002

countries, the GOA is not interested in pursuing such a capability. Local government authorities and environmental councils are concerned not only about potential health hazards, but also the impact such a facility could have on future tourism prospects. With donor assistance, the legacy of Albania's "hot zones" could be cleaned up in the not too distant future.

WITHERS